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Terrorism: More Force Won't Help

By ROBERT BOROSAGE

So, what can be done about terrorism? The answer—despite the flood of suggestions from commentators, crisis managers and columnists—is *not much*, unless the United States is prepared to change the way it lives in the world.

This being Ronald Reagan's America, technological and military solutions are much in vogue.

Liberals prefer prevention. New metal detectors, terrorist sniffers, luggage searchers, airport scanners are surely on the way, they say. These will make air travel marginally more burdensome, placate fears of airline passengers who might otherwise travel by road or rail, reduce our resistance to intrusive officialdom and have little or no effect on terrorism.

Conservatives prefer retaliation: Bomb the Beirut airport. Take out Iranian oil fields. Launch a strike team at "terrorist camps." President Reagan, hoping to mask his prudence with bravado, has invoked "Rambo" as his model for the future.

Mild-mannered academics, who normally find backyard basketball too violent for their taste, are particularly susceptible to such fantasies. Calls for vengeance provide psychic relief for the frustrated and fiscal relief for the military and the intelligence agencies. They feel good and sound hairy-chested, but retaliation would do more harm than good.

When you get stung, however badly, it seldom makes any sense to take a stick to the hornet's nest. Israel, which is often invoked as a model of retaliatory will, is the victim of more terrorist attacks than any country on Earth. Retaliation in the Middle East will put more Americans at risk, not only abroad but eventually at home as well.

So what can be done? An honest answer is *not much*, unless a dramatic change in U.S. policy is forthcoming. Exposure to terrorism is the tax that U.S. citizens pay for the global engagement of their government. If the United States continues to intervene in regional and national disputes across the world, then American citizens will be at risk. Terrorists, however fanatical, are not insane. They represent causes and groups that are frustrated by U.S.

policy and are too weak to strike at the U.S. militarily. U.S. citizens or businesses thus become the target.

The use of U.S. military force isn't part of the solution; it's part of the problem. In the Middle East the Administration's disastrous insistence—against the advice of the Pentagon, local diplomats and allies—on using the Marines in support of one faction against another in internecine Lebanese politics made America a combatant in struggles that it scarcely understood. The folly cost the lives of 241 Marines and has put U.S. citizens at risk to this day. In Central America it is disingenuous to suggest that we can arm and train a military engaged in fighting a civil war and then expect our advisers to be immune to retaliation.

Nor is this the fate of the United States alone. The Soviets find their soldiers, bases and diplomats at risk in Afghanistan; the Cubans experience the same fate in Ethiopia. The major distinction is that the United States is more deeply involved in more contentious disputes in more areas of the world than those countries are.

The problem is not American weakness, but is rather the nature and extent of U.S. intervention. We are, after all, five years into the Reagan era. "America is back"; the military has got whatever it wanted for five years. The CIA is back, too, meddling around the world. The Reagan doctrine even has us supporting terrorist bands of our own in Central America, Africa, South-

east Asia. We conquered Grenada, took out Libyan jets in the Gulf of Sidra.

This is the fifth year of an Administration that prides itself on its manly disregard for international law and institutions, an Administration that has made a point of bellicose, interventionist and unilateral policy. What the Beirut crisis shows is the cost of this course.

A country of wealth with global interests has the greatest stake in law and order. We will thrive under virtually any set of rules, given our wealth and energy. Thus it is imperative that we clothe our actions in law and our concerns with international legitimacy. If we are viewed not as mediator but as partisan, we will be a target for terrorists.

The Beirut crisis is in this way a message to American citizens. Our government is pursuing an interventionist foreign policy that involves the United States in disputes across the globe. We are flouting the very international institutions and laws that once gave our involvement legitimacy. As citizens we are thus put at risk, personally vulnerable to the abhorrent weapons of the

weak—terror, kidnaping, suicidal assault. We have been blessed that such terror has not yet come to our shores. No technological fix, no retaliatory strikes can protect us. We must bear the price or change the policy.

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